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Atari Online News, Etc.  
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~ IE 8, 9, & 10 Going Out! ~ Edge Browser in Trouble ~ Brad Fuller Dies!

-\* Attacking UK's Hacking Plans! \*-  
-\* IBM Workers Union Suspends Campaign \*-  
-\* Apple OS X Most Vulnerable Software of 2015 \*-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

"-----"

More Obama and his "I have the power..." speeches. It happened faster than I anticipated, but here we have the POTUS trying to pull rank and enact gun control legislation without going through Congress. I could go on and on about this nonsense, but the debate will continue elsewhere, I'm sure. But, for the record, I'm not totally against "gun control," but I have a problem with how and what Obama is trying to do. I think that he has far too many other important things to deal with these days - North Korea and its I-need-to-prove-I'm-a-powerhouse-player dictator, and much more!

On to less serious stuff; it's only early January...

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Activision Blizzard Buys MLG To Build ESPN o f Esports !

"-----"

Veteran Game Composer Brad Fuller Dies!  
Sharknado Still Coming to Atari 2600!  
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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Activision Blizzard Buys MLG for Estimated \$46M  
To Build ESPN of Esports

Just weeks after announcing its esports division, Activision Blizzard has acquired the assets of live esports event organizer Major League Gaming for an estimated \$46 million. The move is part of a larger plan to create the Activision Blizzard esports broadcast network, or the ESPN of esports.

The move is a recognition of the growing importance of esports where gamers become spectators of professional gamers who are competing for increasingly large prize pools in tournaments. Esports could be a \$465 million industry by 2017. The esports business has been nascent for a long time, but it has grown rapidly in the past few years and the move by Activision Blizzard, one of the largest Western game publishers, is a stamp of approval.

The deal was first reported on Friday by Esports Observer. Of the amount, \$31 million was paid in cash, and \$15 million is subject to further conditions. Activision Blizzard did not specifically confirm that amount, which Esports Observer reported.

This buy fits into Activision's recent moves. Back in October, Activision Blizzard started a new esports media networks division, and it hired former MLG president Mike Sepso as its senior vice president. Sepso is now able to reunite with his former colleagues.

It was great to be able to walk aback into the office and announce this to the staff, Sepso said in an interview. We are really at an interesting inflection point for esports as a mainstream activity. Having the combined resources of Activision Blizzard and MLG is a tremendous opportunity for us to move the whole industry forward.

Steve Bornstein, the former CEO of ESPN, is chairman of that new division at Activision Blizzard. It's increased the prize pools for 2016's championships for two of its main esports games, the online strategy game Heroes of the Storm and the card-battler Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft. Rival Electronic Arts also set up an esports division and put former chief operating officer Peter Moore in charge of it.

Bobby Kotick, CEO of Activision Blizzard, said in a statement, Our acquisition of Major League Gaming's business furthers our plans to create the ESPN of esports. MLG's ability to create premium content, its proven broadcast technology platform including its live streaming capabilities strengthens our strategic position in competitive gaming. MLG has an incredibly strong and seasoned team and a thriving community. Together, we will create new ways to celebrate players and their unique skills, dedication and commitment to gaming. We are excited to add Sundance and the entire MLG esports team to our competitive gaming initiatives.

The announcement leaked on Friday, and the companies confirmed that it was happening today. The eSports Observer reported that MLG's chief executive, Sundance DiGiovanni, had stepped down from his post and was replaced by Greg Chisholm, former chief financial officer of MLG. But DiGiovanni said in an interview with GamesBeat that he and the entire MLG esports team will join Activision Blizzard.

New York-based MLG was founded by DiGiovanni and Sepso in 2002. It holds official video game tournaments throughout the U.S. and Canada, and it broadcasts them on both television and the Internet. Its aim is to elevate video games to become competitive spectator sports. It holds tournaments for games such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive and Call of Duty.

Activision Blizzard said in a press release that the move will further its strategic growth plan in competitive gaming and it will create new opportunities for players, fans and partners across the global esports community.

The esports industry has an estimated 100 million viewers already. By 2017, esports is projected to have over 300 million viewers, according to market researcher Newzoo. Activision Blizzard already owns a number of competitive gaming titles, such as Hearthstone, StarCraft, Heroes of the Storm, and Call of Duty.

There's so much opportunity, with more resources behind it, DiGiovanni said. It's an incredibly exciting opportunity for me personally with more than a decade of experience in it.

MLG runs MLG.tv, a premium online broadcast network for professional-level esports, and it operates the MLG Pro Circuit, the longest-running esports league in North America. MLG also operates GameBattles, an online gaming tournament system across console, PC and mobile platforms. MLG will continue to operate MLG.tv, MLG Pro Circuit, and GameBattles.

We have diversified and made ourselves a more balanced and stronger company, DiGiovanni said. If you look at the history of our company, we have had a tremendous amount of success and are proud of what we built. To be able to join a company with the resources of Activision Blizzard is great.

The larger underlying trend is that game publishers have started to attract online audiences and are increasingly looking to diversify their efforts across media channels, said Joost van Dreunen, analyst at market researcher SuperData Research. In addition, considering the current momentum behind eSports, it is no surprise that the segment is starting to consolidate.

Earlier in 2015, Swedish broadcasting group MTG acquired a majority share in ESL, MLG's rival, for \$64 million. And Blizzard already acquired the assets of the IGN Pro League back in 2013. Now, with the acquisition of MLG's assets, Activision is on a path to further vertically integrate its effort behind competitive gaming and bolster its position, van Dreunen said.

Following several other acquisitions and announcements from Activision, it is clear that the firm is evolving into a media conglomerate rather than a company that simply develops and publishes video games, van Dreunen said. This is a consistent trend we have also observed elsewhere in the industry, with firms like Electronic Arts, Ubisoft and Take-Two Interactive, as the potential of ad-based revenue has come into focus.

SuperData estimated that esports currently generates \$748 million in revenues, and it is on track to reach \$1.9 billion by 2018.

->A-ONE Gaming Online

Online Users Growl & Purr!

#### Obituary: Veteran Game Composer Brad Fuller

Gamasutra has learned that veteran game composer Brad Fuller passed away over the holidays after a long bout with cancer.

Fuller had a vibrant career in audio production, and is best known in the game industry for his work at Atari in the 1980s crafting the sound of seminal Atari console games like Donkey Kong and Tetris, as well as Atari arcade games like Marble Madness and Klax.

He spent roughly 14 years at Atari and went on to work as both a composer and an educator, as well as a valued member of the Interactive Audio Special Interest Group, where he served for a time as chairman of the Interactive Composition Working Group.

#### Sharknado Still Coming to Atari 2600, Now New Name

It is interesting to me how much companies will go out of their way to protect an intellectual property in certain areas. Take Sharknado for example. AtariAge forum member, neotokeo2001 was working on a game that used the name Sharknado and it was similarly based on the movie of the same name. I say similarly because this is the Atari 2600, there is only so much that can be done to replicate anything from a movie. My point is, neotokeo had his work cut out for him if he was to even evoke similar feelings out of gamers that the movie did with viewers. NBCUniversal has sent neotokeo a cease and desist letter, forcing him to rename his game to Twist R-Shark.

While I understand the desire to protect your IP, sometimes it goes too far. There needs to be a certain amount of fanfare that is allowed to flourish. Some companies get it, while others don't.

Twist R-Shark, hell of a name to type out, is an overhead action game. The gameplay will feature both fast and slow moving targets to deal with. There is a scoring system in place so there may be a thread eventually on AtariAge for high scores.

Graphically, this is about on par with what the Atari 2600 could produce. There are plenty of enemies from hammerhead sharks to electric eels and manta rays to avoid. I say avoid because in the early game play video the weapons go right through them. This

could be an early programming situation though.

There are plans to include a mini comic with each copy of Twist R-Shark also.

Other movie games homebrew developers have released on the Atari 2600 include:

Legends (all-encompassing horror game) covered here on RGM

Many more over on AtariAge's forums. Head over, check them out and maybe tip us on some of the better ones.

Twist R-Shark, while no longer called Sharknado, will be available by March 2016. Follow the latest updates on the AtariAge thread.

#### Atari Shuts Down the 7800    Today in History    January 1st, 1992

A good six year run is what the Atari 7800 had in North America. It could have been longer had Atari played their cards right in licensing the NES. They didn't and it cost them dearly.

Interestingly, the Atari 7800 was announced a good two years BEFORE it was released. They announced it in mid-1984 and then released in mid-1986 for some reason. It is not quite clear why they did that but they did. It was Atari is the only reason I can come up with (I know, it was because the sale of the company). Even with backwards compatibility with the Atari 2600 could not bring financial success to the Atari 7800, especially after Nintendo unleashed their NES.

The Atari 7800 was nothing if not ambitious. General Computer Corporation, the developers of the Atari 7800, had a lot of great stuff in the works. Stuff that never saw release. Under the hood is a CPU that is not unlike that of the one in the Nintendo Entertainment System and an unused port (again, like the NES, at least in North America). There was a planned keyboard and disk drive that would have turned the 7800 into a computer, much like what Nintendo did with their NES in Japan - the Famicom. There was even a planned Laser Disc player attachment and a hi-scores saving cartridge. All of those were scrapped when Atari changed hands to Jack Tramiel.

For more information on the legal situation, names and different companies that carried the name Atari please check out Atari Book and Atari Museum. They detail all of the twists and turns quite well.

The Atari 7800 was held back from day one really. Atari mishandled the development, launch and then support of the console. Somehow that was accomplished under the ownership of two different entities. Development of new games was still going on up into mid-1993 when the plug was pulled to focus on the Atari Jaguar console. Over on AtariAge forums, members are still supporting the console with homebrew releases, updates to commercial games and hacks. Fans won't let it die.

While not the last Atari console to hit the market, the 7800 was definitely the most storied of them.

The Atari 7800 may be dead but over on Ebay you can still score some great games for great prices.

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Apple, Google, Microsoft Attack UK Government's Hacking Plans

Tech companies including Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook have criticized plans by the UK government for a new law that would allow law enforcement to hack computer systems to access data.

The equipment interference provisions in the draft Investigatory Powers Bill would allow the intelligence and security services, police and the armed forces to hack into devices to obtain data, such as communications, when they have a warrant to do so. The government argues that the hacking provisions - part of the wider internet surveillance legislation - are needed so that law enforcement can intercept the communications of criminals even when they are encrypted.

However tech companies have warned that the plan would set a dangerous precedent that would be followed by other countries, will damage trust in their services and may be impossible to implement anyway.

In a combined submission to the committee of MPs examining the legislation, technology giants Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter and Yahoo! warned this provision would be a step in the wrong direction: To the extent this could involve the introduction of risks or vulnerabilities into products or services, it would be a very dangerous precedent to set, and we would urge your government to reconsider, they said.

They warned that the legislation doesn't currently contain any requirements to protect network integrity and cyber security or any requirement for agencies to inform companies of vulnerabilities that could later be exploited by others.

We urge the government to make clear that actions taken under authorization do not introduce new risks or vulnerabilities for users or businesses they said.

In its submission Apple said the plans would put tech companies in a very difficult position. For the consumer in, say, Germany, this might represent hacking of their data by an Irish business on behalf of the UK state under a bulk warrant - activity which the provider is not even allowed to confirm or deny. Maintaining trust

in such circumstances will be extremely difficult.

It said there is a need for much greater clarity as to how the powers in the bill will be applied especially because this legislation will set a precedent which, if followed by other countries, could endanger the privacy and security of users in the UK and elsewhere.

Mobile operator Vodafone warned that equipment interference elements are perhaps the most contentious of all the powers within the scope of the draft bill.

The obligations relating to equipment interference have the potential to significantly undermine trust in the United Kingdom's communications service providers, it warned.

It said equipment interference amounts to a major imposition on the freedom of an operator to design and operate its services in the way it sees fit and said that under the powers in the bill, service providers could be under secret obligations to operate a backdoor in the equipment or services provided to customers, and questioned whether such an intrusive power is necessary at all.

Vodafone adds that any equipment interference requirement should not force companies to reduce their own security standards, something important in an environment where operators face regular attacks from third parties. It warned any weakening of our network or service defences, which protect critical national infrastructure and attempt to maximise the availability of essential services, would be highly undesirable.

The telecoms operator also warned that the legislation as it stands could be used to require an operator to be actively involved in an equipment interference operation. Instead of simply providing data or implementing an interception warrant, this could mean companies would be required to actively seek out vulnerabilities for exploitation, or to develop vulnerabilities and exploits, it warned.

Turning network operator employees into spies and hackers is manifestly inappropriate, and the framework should be modified to expressly limit the requirement to assist to exclude this type of requirement, it said.

Firefox maker Mozilla warned that the bulk systems intrusion provisions in the bill could be used to compel a software developer, like Mozilla, to ship hostile software, essentially malware, to a user or many users without notice.

The company said this is problematic from both philosophical and practical perspectives. Because Mozilla's products are open source any user has access to the source code, and may freely modify and redistribute it, which means changes to its software are public. Were we compelled to create a version of Firefox that was modified to permit surreptitious intrusion subject to a government order, the modifications could and would be discovered by the Mozilla community, it warned.

But the issue of hacking is not the only concern raised about the proposed legislation.

Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter and Yahoo! also said they were concerned that the UK's insistence that its laws should apply to companies based in other countries could create conflicting legal obligations and that an increasingly chaotic international legal system will leave companies in the impossible position of deciding whose laws to violate. The UK should make it clear that no company would be required to comply with a warrant if doing so would contravene its legal obligations in other jurisdictions, they said.

In its submission the United Nations human rights rapporteurs warned that the draft bill could result in mass surveillance that lacks adequate independent oversight and transparency that will ultimately stifle fundamental freedoms and exert a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association.

#### IBM Workers Union Indefinitely Suspends Organizing Campaign

Communications Workers of America Local 1701, a union dedicated to IBM employees, said in a statement that it will officially suspend its organizing campaign.

The Alliance@IBM chapter had 400 members at its height, according to an article from Computerworld, though that number has contracted to about 200 currently. Lee Conrad, a former IBM employee who has led the effort since 1999, told Computerworld his group's website could see more than 140,000 visitors during a major layoff.

"In an email sent to Alliance members we announced that the union organizing campaign at IBM has been suspended. Years of job cuts and membership losses have taken their toll," read a post on the group's official Facebook page.

The statement further said that union membership was never enough "to change the working conditions or stop the massive job cuts at IBM." On its website, the union said its ultimate goal was a collective bargaining agreement with IBM, though it focused mainly on the company off-shoring jobs and worker layoffs.

Alliance@IBM said on its website which the chapter's statement said would stay live but would not be updated that the company had 230,000 workers in the U.S. during the mid-1980s compared to about 71,000 now.

However, it's not clear how the group came up with that figure. Computerworld pointed out that IBM stopped publishing its U.S.-based workforce five years ago, so it is hard to tell how many of its positions have been eliminated or moved abroad. Still, recent mandatory filings by the company seem to present a bleak picture about its global workforce.

From a global point of view, the company and its subsidiaries reduced its total workforce from 431,212 in 2013 to 379,592 in 2014, according to the company's 2014 Annual Report filing to the Securities and Exchange Commission. With a greater reliance

industrywide on manufacturing abroad and as-needed contractors, there's a good chance some of those jobs lost were in the U.S.

## Surprise, Apple's OS X Comes Out As Most Vulnerable Software of 2015

In a study conducted by CVE Details, the most vulnerable software of the previous year has been identified as Apple's OS X and the tech-giant is also the company with most bugs.

With 2016 coming, people in all sectors have been busy summarizing 2015 with reports and lists of who have been the winners and who have been the losers. The tech experts and security personnel have been at it too, with CVE Details producing a list of most vulnerable software of the past year.

Many would have expected the list to be topped by Adobe Flash, for the software had reported a number of zero days right from the beginning of 2015. However, the final list took everyone by surprise, for it was Apple's OS X that came out as the most vulnerable software of 2015. What was more shocking was that Adobe Flash didn't even make it to second place, for that spot was taken by iOS, another Apple product.

CVE (Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures) is a vulnerability identifying the body which is used by app developers, security researchers as well as security firms all over the world. The list produced is based on reports filed by cyber-security firms, independent researchers, as well as the software creators, who asked for CVE identifiers.

The list was published by CVE Details, which is a website that serves as a repository of security vulnerabilities according to their CVE identifiers. Their report also shows Apple was the company in whose products the highest number of bugs (654) were discovered in 2015. IBM, the leader of this not-so-lucrative race in 2014, has improved markedly, as it fell down to the 7th place this time around.

The news comes as a shock to people all over the world, be it Apple developers and researchers, Macbook and iPhone users, or the rest of the world. Apple's OS X and their iOS have always been marketed as highly immune to threats and attacks. However, one of the foremost authorities on finding out security vulnerabilities in software says otherwise, with Apple's OS X and iOS being the most and second-most vulnerable software of 2015 respectively.

The OS X reported a staggering 384 bugs this past year while Apple's iOS reported the next highest number of bugs with 375. Adobe, everyone's expected leader, sits safely at 316, much behind OS X's tally. So much for Apple's security reputation.

Microsoft's support lifecycle for every Windows version is a generous 10 years from the date it was launched. That means even those still clinging to Windows Vista can count on more than a year of security updates, until April 11, 2017, and anyone running Windows 7 can do so with confidence until January 14, 2020.

So Windows 8, which was released in October of 2012, should be supported until well into the next decade, right?

Nope.

Thanks to a quirk in the support lifecycle, Windows 8 users are about to be cut off from security updates. When the first Patch Tuesday of 2016 rolls around on January 12, it will represent the last batch of updates for Windows 8.

If you're still running Windows 8, it's time to update to Windows 8.1 or Windows 10 or risk exposing your PC to unpatched security risks.

The reason for this odd state of affairs is that Microsoft is treating Windows 8.1 as a service pack to Windows 8. The rules allow you to hold off on installing that service pack, but only for two years. Here's the formal policy, which I've stitched together from two separate documents:

Unlike service packs that are typically just a collection of fixes, Windows 8.1 has new features and enhancements. We designed Windows 8.1 to give customers an ability to deploy this update in a manner that is similar to how customers deploy service packs, therefore we are applying the existing service pack support policy to Windows 8.1.

[For] Windows 8, support ends 24 months after the next service pack releases or at the end of the product's support lifecycle, whichever comes first. If you are using software without the latest service pack you won't be offered any new security or non-security updates, although preexisting updates will continue to be offered.

And that time is now up.

The good news is that upgrading to Windows 8.1 pushes the deadline out significantly. Windows 8.1 reaches the end of its Extended Support phase on January 10, 2023, and there won't be any additional service packs to complicate that deadline.

Upgrading to Windows 10 extends the lifecycle even further, to October 14, 2025.

Windows 8 might seem like a historical footnote at this point. However, as of the end of December 2015, three analytics sources I track calculated the percentage of PCs running Windows 8 (not including 8.1) at between 2 and 3 percent of the total installed base of desktop and laptop PCs and Macs. That small percentage of a very large number (about 1.5 billion by most estimates) still adds up to between 30 and 40 million PCs.

The upgrade from Windows 8 to 8.1 is unlike any other Windows upgrade; it requires a trip to the Windows Store rather than the

normal Windows Update route. The update is free for almost all. The one exception: Any enterprise with a Windows 8 Volume License that doesn't include Software Assurance has to pay extra.

I suspect that most of the devices still running Windows 8 are consumer PCs, purchased by technically unsophisticated users who've never been to the Windows Store and ignored any prompts they might have seen to upgrade. Starting next week, they're living very dangerously indeed.

#### Microsoft All Set To Pull The Plug on IE 8, 9 and 10 Next Tuesday

Microsoft is set to retire Internet Explorer 8, 9 and 10 for most versions of the Windows operating system next Tuesday, according to a support page from Microsoft. What this means is that Microsoft will cease security updates for the aged browsers, putting people still using them at significant security risks.

Microsoft warned of the change last year. The only exceptions to the planned retirements will be for Windows Vista, Windows Server 2008 and Windows Server 2012. The first two will see Internet Explorer 9 still supported, while Internet Explorer 10 will continue to be supported on Windows Server 2012.

Organizations that are on Windows 8.1 or Windows 10 have nothing to worry about, given that they come with Internet Explorer 11 installed. Of course, Microsoft is probably fretting over Windows 10 and the dismal adoption rate of its new Edge browser on that front.

The completely rebuilt Edge browser was slated to replace Internet Explorer, though it is floundering badly. Indeed, a report this week on Computerworld pointed to a continual dip in user share over the last three months, according to data from three analytics firms. Still, Microsoft is finally supposed to begin supporting extensions soon and that should help boost the popularity of Edge.

For now, organizations that are still running soon-to-be-retired versions of Internet Explorer on unsupported platforms are well advised to upgrade as soon as possible. While any existing patches or updates will still be released as part of Microsoft's monthly Patch Tuesday release next Tuesday, continuing to use them beyond Tuesday will put them in a position of increasing risk.

#### Web Metrics Vendor Reports Major Decline in Microsoft Edge's Browser Share

Microsoft's Edge browser is in trouble.

That's the conclusion drawn from data published Friday by a U.S. analytics company, which portrayed a plummeting user share - a measurement of unique visitors to websites, and one of the few proxies for real-world adoption - of the browser amongst Windows 10 users last month.

According to Net Applications, Edge's share of the global Windows 10 user base fell to 23% in December, dropping eight percentage points from the month before.

One of three analytics sources report that Microsoft's Edge lost a big chunk of share in December, but the remaining two say the default browser in Windows 10 held steady or gained a small amount of ground.

Although Net Applications had charted the decline of Edge since Windows 10's late-July introduction, December's drop was nearly three times the largest prior single-month contraction.

(Because Edge works only on Windows 10, it's relatively easy to calculate the percentage of Windows 10 users who run the browser. That's not the case with other browsers, including Internet Explorer (IE), Google's Chrome or Mozilla's Firefox, which run on other editions of Windows or on rival operating systems, such as Apple's OS X.)

Another pair of data sources put Edge's situation in a different light, however, showing that the new browser had stayed stable or even gained ground, if only slightly, in December.

Irish metrics vendor StatCounter tapped Edge's worldwide share of Windows 10 for December at 13%, and the U.S.-only share at 18%, the same numbers as for the month before. (StatCounter's figures are dramatically different than Net Applications' in part because it tracks usage share by counting page views tallied for each browser, making its measurements akin to browsing activity, not the fraction of users running a specific browser.)

A third source, the Digital Analytics Program (DAP), depicted Edge's share as improving by a slim margin. DAP pegged Edge's share of Windows 10 for December at 23%, up one point from November. In the four months from September to December, DAP has recorded Edge's share in a tight range from 22% on the low end (November) to 25% on the high (September).

DAP collects and collates visits to more than 4,000 websites on over 400 different domains maintained by U.S. government agencies, including some, like the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), that attract non-U.S. residents. The bulk of the traffic DAP measures, however, is domestic.

(DAP's visits-based methodology is a tweener metric, halfway between visitors and page views in the analytics world: One person visiting a site over two days, for example, who looked at four pages each day, would generate one unique visitor for the month under Net Applications' methodology, two visits for DAP, and eight page views for StatCounter.)

Edge's lackluster adoption flies in the face of concerted efforts by Microsoft to promote the application, including swapping Edge for rival browsers during an upgrade from Windows 7 or Windows 8.1 unless the user intervenes.

Microsoft has been largely silent about Edge's adoption, spending more of its messaging time touting technical and feature

improvements - or in the case of the still-missing support for extensions, announcing the postponement - than on how its uptake has been going.

Among a list of factoids that Microsoft revealed about Windows 10 on Monday, the Windows group's head marketing executive said that Edge had been used a total of 44.5 billion minutes (about 742 million user-hours) by Windows 10 owners in December. Without context, however - metrics such as the average time online per month for all Windows 10 users, or a corresponding user-hour data point for non-Edge browsers - the statistic is meaningless.

Microsoft was able to tally time spent on Edge because Windows 10's compulsory data collection policy, the default setting in the OS, as well as the less-intrusive "Enhanced" option, collects "how frequently or how long you use certain features or apps and which apps you use most often," according to Microsoft.

#### Reality Check: Your Computer Is Most Likely Too Weak To Run VR Headsets

Most computers don't have the processing muscle to adequately power virtual reality headsets like the Samsung Gear VR, Nvidia warns.

If you had your heart set on experiencing some of the adventures promised by virtual reality, you may have to shell out some more money before you begin your journey.

This year has been teased as the big coming out party for virtual reality, with several companies planning software and hardware releases that will transport goggle-wearing users to other 3D worlds. But to fully enjoy that journey, the graphics processor in your computer is going to have to be a lot stronger to render VR images - about seven times stronger than the average power found in gamers' PCs today, according to Nvidia, the world's largest maker of stand-alone graphics chips.

Only 13 million PCs worldwide will have that kind of power in 2016, according to the Santa Clara, California-based graphics chip maker. That is less than 1 percent of the 1.43 billion computers expected to be in use this year, according to research firm Gartner data cited by Bloomberg.

"From 3D gaming to product design, to cinematic experiences and beyond, virtual reality promises to change the way we experience everyday things," Nvidia said in an emailed statement.

"Delivering VR is a complex challenge, especially since immersive VR requires seven times the graphics processing power compared to traditional 3D applications and games."

Once confined to the realm of science-fiction movies like Walt Disney's "Tron," virtual reality is expected to be a top attraction at the Consumer Electronics Show next week in Las Vegas. So far only two headsets, Google's Cardboard and Samsung's Gear VR, are being offered to consumers.

Oculus Rift, Sony PlayStation VR and HTC Vive - all of which are focused on high-end VR games and videos - are expected to be released this year, when industry watcher Juniper Research expects about 3 million headsets to be sold. By 2020, Juniper expects that number to hit 30 million.

The lack of adequate processor power isn't likely to temper the enthusiasm of fans hyping the devices or curtail the flood of developers creating all sorts of content. Major streaming companies Hulu and Netflix work with the devices, while game makers like Microsoft, Harmonix and Sony are preparing to offer games.

But the power warning appears to reinforce lowered expectations for how quick the uptake will be for VR devices first voiced by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who pushed Facebook to buy Oculus last year for \$2 billion.

"This is going to grow slowly," he warned in September. "If you think about the arrival of computers or smartphones, the first units shipped did not ship tens of millions in their first year. But they proved an idea and made it real."

#### Gene Roddenberry's Floppy Disk Stash Decrypted After 30 Years

Files from a collection of nearly 200 floppy disks belonging to Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry has been recovered after three months of work from data recovery specialists DriveSavers. The floppies reportedly contain notes, story ideas and even scripts, all of which are thought to have been produced in the 1980s. While these disks contain just 160 kilobytes of data each, they're likely to be of great interest to fans of the series and of Roddenberry himself. However, it seems that there are currently no plans to share the files at present, as the contents of the disks are still under the possession of the Roddenberry estate. The floppies were found several years after Roddenberry's death in 1991. For years, the data contained on the disks was inaccessible thanks to a quirk of their owner's computing habits; rather than using a standard PC, he wrote on a custom-built computer with a custom-programmed OS, according to a report from Ars Technica.

Roddenberry apparently owned two of these customized computers one was sold at auction, and one had since broken down. DriveSavers were given access to the non-functional computer and the collection of disks, and after three months had developed a piece of software capable of reading the data. However, this was only the first step in a longer process. Reading through the work proved to be a tedious and time-consuming task in its own right, and it would take almost a year for the team to transform the data into documents that could be read by human eyes. All entities involved are remaining fairly silent about what exactly was found on the disks but that might not be the case for very long. DriveSavers director of engineering Mike Cobb has teased that more details might be on their way, given that 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the Star Trek franchise.

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#### Microsoft's New Tally for Windows 10: 200 Million

Microsoft today updated its Windows 10 claim, saying that the new operating system is on more than 200 million devices that have been used at least once in the past month.

The number included not only personal computers and tablets, a company spokesman confirmed, but also Xbox One video game consoles — the box got Windows 10 in November — and smartphones now running a preview of Windows 10 Mobile.

"As of today, there are more than 200 million monthly active devices around the world running Windows 10," asserted Yusuf Mehdi, Microsoft's lead marketing executive for the Windows and devices group. Mehdi tossed out several other upbeat statistics in a post to a company blog Monday.

"Windows 10 adoption is accelerating, with more than 40% of new Windows 10 devices becoming active since Black Friday," Mehdi said, referring to the shopping day after the U.S.'s Thanksgiving holiday. "In fact, Windows 10 continues to be on the fastest

growth trajectory of any version of Windows - ever - outpacing Windows 7 by nearly 140% and Windows 8 by nearly 400%."

Mehdi also announced that 22 million of the 200 million-device total - or about 11% - were in enterprises and educational organizations, a number likely derived from tallies of Windows 10 Enterprise and Windows 10 Education, the editions available only to businesses, schools and universities.

Today's data refresh was the first from Microsoft in three months: On Oct. 6 a different company official said that 110 million users were then running Windows 10.

It's impossible to corroborate Microsoft's claims using data from outside the company - the "monthly active" framing of the 200-million measurement implied that Microsoft was tallying unique connections to the Windows Update service, which polls Redmond's servers only when a device is on - but third-party statistics hint that fewer devices are running Windows 10, and that the OS has fallen slightly behind Windows 7's uptake tempo in its first five months.

On Friday, U.S.-based analytics vendor Net Applications pegged Windows 10 with an overall user share of 10% - an estimate of the fraction of the global users who went online in December running the OS - and indicated that Windows 10 accounted for 10.9% of all Windows-powered personal computers.

Net Applications' user share represented almost 164 million Windows 10 PCs worldwide, assuming a total of 1.5 billion Windows systems in use. (Microsoft has frequently cited the latter figure when it has touted revenue opportunities for developers of Windows software.) The 164 million, however, does not include tablets, smartphones and Xbox One consoles running Windows 10.

Nor did Net Applications' numbers support Mehdi's assertion that Windows 10 is "on the fastest growth trajectory of any version of Windows - ever."

While that was true earlier in the post-launch lifecycle of Windows 10, an adoption slowdown has now put it behind Windows 7's same after-release point. With five full months of availability, Windows 10 - which launched July 29 - held a 10.9% user share of all Windows PCs. At the same mark for Windows 7, that OS accounted for 11.2% of all Windows machines. (Again, there was a difference between Net Applications' metrics and what Microsoft measured, since the latter tossed in tablets, game consoles and smartphones.)

Windows 7 also had another seven days to accumulate its five-month user share, and inherited other advantages, including a much more robust PC market and the prime before- and after-the-holidays sales season. Windows 10 only got the former.

Another analytics company, Ireland-based StatCounter, also tapped Windows 10 as slightly slower on the uptake in its first several months when compared to Windows 7. StatCounter pegged Windows 10 with a usage share - an indication of online activity because it's based on website page views - of 11.8% for December, but Windows 7 at 11.9% for March 2010, that OS's fifth month after

launch.

Microsoft has not yet parked its Windows-10-or-bust wagon: It's planning to expand the OS's user base, perhaps dramatically so, in the near future by adding the Windows 10 upgrade to Windows Update on eligible Windows 7 and Windows 8.1 devices. That scheme, which has riled some users since it was disclosed in late October, will first place the Windows 10 upgrade on the list as an optional download, but soon thereafter flip the switch to make it "recommended," which means most consumer and small business PCs will automatically download and kick off the upgrade process. Users will be able to abort the upgrade after it starts, however.

By all evidence, Microsoft has not yet begun that Windows 10 upgrade seeding via Windows Update.

#### The Government Says Internet Service Isn't Expanding Fast Enough

Think that access to broadband should be growing faster? The government agrees with you.

A new report from the Federal Communications Commission finds that while providers have done a decent job building out high-speed Internet, as many as 10 percent of Americans roughly 34 million people lack access to what the government considers broadband.

As a result, the FCC has concluded that the expansion of broadband isn't happening in a "reasonable and timely" fashion, and the agency says the law calls on the FCC to "take immediate action" to speed things up.

"Broadband," by the agency's definition, is Internet service that enables download speeds of 25 Mbps and upload speeds of 3 Mbps.

"Advanced telecommunications capability is not being deployed in a reasonable and timely fashion to all Americans," according to an FCC factsheet.

From all this, you can expect the FCC to put more pressure on Internet providers to step up their efforts. You can also expect the industry to push back.

The FCC's broadband definition is politically controversial because the agency last year took the opportunity to revise its standard upward, from the previous broadband definition of 10 Mbps down, 1 Mbps up.

Critics of the agency said then that the FCC would use the higher standard to justify imposing more aggressive requirements on Internet providers. And indeed, Internet providers themselves slammed this week's report, saying it "lacks credibility."

"This annual process has become a cynical exercise," the trade group US Telecom said Friday, "one that is patently intended

to reach a predetermined conclusion that will justify a continuing expansion of the agency's own regulatory reach."

On the heels of this report, the government is expected to take a series of steps to push broadband deployment forward. Some of these include reforming a low-income telephone subsidy program to allow poor Americans to buy home Internet, and disbursing millions of dollars in federal money to support Internet providers' construction projects.

#### Mark Zuckerberg Aims To Build Own AI Butler, a la 'Iron Man'

Mark Zuckerberg has ambitions of living more like Tony Stark, the alter ego of superhero Iron Man.

The Facebook CEO revealed in a Facebook post Sunday that he is planning to build his own artificial-intelligence assistant that can help him around the house and at the office.

"You can think of it kind of like Jarvis in Iron Man," he writes, referring to the robotic butler in the popular Marvel movies.

Zuckerberg said he plans to begin by boning up on existing technology teaching it such skills as understanding his voice to control functions in the house, such as lighting, temperature and music. One product that impresses him already is the Amazon Echo, an Internet-connected wireless speaker wrapped around a digital personal assistant named Alexa that he says allows him to control music while both his hands are occupied with Max, his newborn daughter.

He then plans to move on to more ambitious tasks.

"I'll teach it to let friends in by looking at their faces when they ring the doorbell," he writes. "I'll teach it to let me know if anything is going on in Max's room that I need to check on when I'm not with her. On the work side, it'll help me visualize data in VR to help me build better services and lead my organizations more effectively."

This isn't the first time the chief of the Menlo Park, California-based company has given himself a challenge designed for personal growth. In past years, Zuckerberg has challenged himself to learn Mandarin, read two books each month and meet a new person every day.

Research in AI, a term used for the ability of a machine, computer or system to exhibit humanlike intelligence, has been dominated lately by large tech companies such as Google and Facebook. The goal is to create machines that can perceive their environment and complete a wide array of everyday tasks previously performed by humans.

Although many futurists envision a more human-beneficial application, some industry watchers, including SpaceX CEO Elon Musk and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, have grown concerned with how far AI can go and its potential dangers. In August

2014, Musk expressed fears that AI could be more dangerous than nuclear weapons. Even famed physicist Stephen Hawking has voiced reservations about AI.

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